

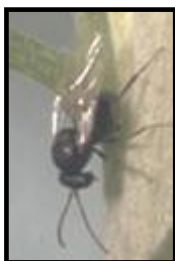


Inside Ag *December 2008*

Bug of the Month ***Aulacidea acroptilonica*** **Russian knapweed gall wasp**



Russian
knapweed



Aulacidea acroptilonica
Photo: USDA

Russian knapweed has become a widespread invasive weed, moving into grazing lands, crop lands, roadsides and riparian corridors. The plant is a perennial often reaching 2-3 feet in height, with an extensive and branching root system. Flowers are pink to lavender in color and can be found from June through September. Dense stands of Russian knapweed crowd out native vegetation and the foliage is toxic to horses.

In many of the areas where the CDA monitors tamarisk biocontrol the dominant understory plant is Russian knapweed (see photo). This situation can be demoralizing to weed managers who battle tamarisk only to see Russian knapweed take its place. The widespread distribution of Russian knapweed and the difficulty in controlling it using conventional methods makes this weed an ideal candidate for biological control.

The USDA has recently developed a biocontrol agent that holds promise for combating Russian knapweed and may be available for release in 2009. The agent is the Russian knapweed gall wasp, *Aulacidea acroptilonica* that causes swelling of Russian knapweed stems and weakens the plant. We have test sites ready to go for the first releases of this control agent in Colorado.